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SUBJECT: TERRORISM IN CAIRO; ANOTHER ROUND OF CRITICISM OF
U.S.: EGYPTIAN MEDIA THEMES, APRIL 4 to 10

Summary

11. All media outlets gave wide coverage to the bombing attack in Cairo's Khan Al-Khalili market, highlighting PM Ahmed Nazif's April 8 hospital visit to victims and Egyptian government officials' claims that the attack was "an individual act." All commentators feared the attacks would unsettle Egypt's economy, with the opposition press fearing further attacks by Islamic groups. Earlier in the week, the U.S. received now familiar criticism: "hegemonic" behavior in the region, "double standards," and "interference" through the funding of Egyptian NGOs. Notable were the critical comments of prominent Egyptian columnists and former FM Maher in a three-page feature in independent Nahdet Misr on April 7-8. The death of Pope John Paul II received broad coverage, though with minimal commentary -- save for one commentator's call that the head of Egyptian TV resign for not giving the Pope's death breaking news coverage. End summary.

Main Themes in the Egyptian Media

12. Khan Al-Khalili market terrorist attack: All major media outlets gave the bombing lead coverage on April 9, highlighting PM Nazif's April 8 hospital visit to victims and quoting government officials' claims that the attack was "an individual act." The media also quoted numerous statements of condemnation from government and civic leaders. Most commentators reflected on previous terrorist attacks in Egypt and expressed concerns that further attacks would negatively affect civil liberties and Egypt's economy. Ibrahim Saada's comments on April 9 in the weekly edition of pro-government Akhbar Al-Youm (circulation: 1,000,000) reflected overall media opinion in urging that opposition parties "unite with the government against this obvious attempt to harm Egypt." The editor-in-chief of opposition Al-Wafd (circulation: 180,000) suggested on April 10, "People are whispering that the attack could be a plot by the Egyptian government to maintain the emergency law." All opposition papers commented on April 10 that Islamic groups might be devising plans to commit more attacks. An online poll on www.masrawy.com asked, "What was the target of the latest terrorist attack in Cairo?" Of the 3,400 respondents as of April 10, 50 percent answered, "To shake up the political scene," 27 percent answered, "To strike Egypt's economy," and 16 percent answered, "A call to Egyptian armed resistance." (Note: Masrawy.com is Egypt's equivalent of Yahoo.com and has a young readership. End note.)

13. U.S. receives usual criticism: The U.S. received another round of criticism this week, all echoing familiar themes. Criticism ranged from an unsigned editorial in pro-government Al-Gomhouriya (circulation: 200,000) on April 7 pointing to a perceived U.S. "double standard" -- the U.S. criticizing Syria for its actions in Lebanon and Sudan for the crisis in Darfur, while being "soft" on Israel -- to criticism from former FM Ahmed Maher of the civil society grants presented by Ambassador Welch in March to Egyptian NGOs. Maher made his remarks on the TV program Al-Zel Al-Ahmar ("Red Shade") on April 4, during which he stated, "The grants were provocative and failed to respect Egyptian law." Throughout the week, several commentators questioned the new Iraqi government's legitimacy for what they saw as a lack of Sunni participation. Independent Nahdet Misr (circulation: 20,000) ran a three-page spread in its April 7-8 edition, "Us and America," featuring leading Egyptian columnists and, again, FM Maher criticizing "U.S. hegemonic attempts on Egypt." The feature's lead article, "The Egyptian Street Says: Yes to Friendship; No to Hegemony," was based on interviews with ordinary Egyptians about their views of the U.S.

14. Pope's death: The death of Pope John Paul II received broad coverage, though little commentary. Several TV networks aired the Pope's funeral live on April 8. On April 4 a columnist with independent Al-Masri Al-Youm (circulation: 20,000) derided Egyptian Television (ETV) for not immediately reporting the Pope's death as breaking news, then demanded the resignation of ETV's president.

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